

**We are grateful to Unicef, New Delhi
for the wonderful illustrations by
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Housework is Everyone's Work

Rhymes for Just and Happy Families

by
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To Parents, Teachers and all other Adults Committed to Equality and Justice

Thirty five years ago when our daughter Meeto was just over a year old, we started introducing her to books. This is when I became interested in children's books and started looking at them critically. I was sad to see that sexism (discrimination on the basis of sex) was rampant in books for little children. The traditional stereotyped images of boys and girls were repeated and reinforced by a large number of books.

For example, I found most books were about boys and men; about their brave deeds, adventures, aspirations and ambitions. They were usually shown as brave, fearless and independent minded. On the other hand, whenever girls and women found a place in these books, they were mostly shown only in their traditional roles of daughters, mothers, wives, lovers and housekeepers. They were depicted as weak, fearful and dependant. Characteristics that were particularly admired in and prescribed for women were subservience, self-sacrifice, serving others.

In most books mainly men were depicted as workers and breadwinners. If one were to assess the parameters of Indian society based on these books, it would appear that in our country there are no women farmers, labourers, teachers, engineers and doctors. The reality however is that a large number of women have always been involved in productive work. Women have not just been cooking food, but over the centuries, they have been equal partners in growing food. In fact in contemporary society there is hardly any activity in which women are not involved.

I am quite sad that children's books have not changed as much as they should have in the last 35 years. They have not even kept pace with the changes in women's roles and lives.

When women join men in activities outside the home and they take on what are called men's responsibilities, it becomes necessary that men join women in the work inside the home, i.e., cooking, cleaning and looking after children. It is both necessary and urgent that the division of labour between girls and boys, men and women within families is changed. Boys and men have to participate in household work to reduce the triple burden of work women often carry. Without these changes within the families girls and women can never achieve equality and gain respect.

Our families, which have been and still are quite patriarchal, must change with the times and practice more equality, justice and democracy. If children do not learn to treat girls and women with respect within the families, they are not likely to respect women within and outside families.

Therefore, we need books that show women in different roles, and as valuable human beings and citizens with dignity and self-respect. We need books in which girls and boys, men and women, are shown sharing household work and care of the young; books that will help our children acquire values and roles for the new society.

Children's literature can play an important role in preparing our children for a human and democratic set-up where girls and boys have equal status and equal opportunities.

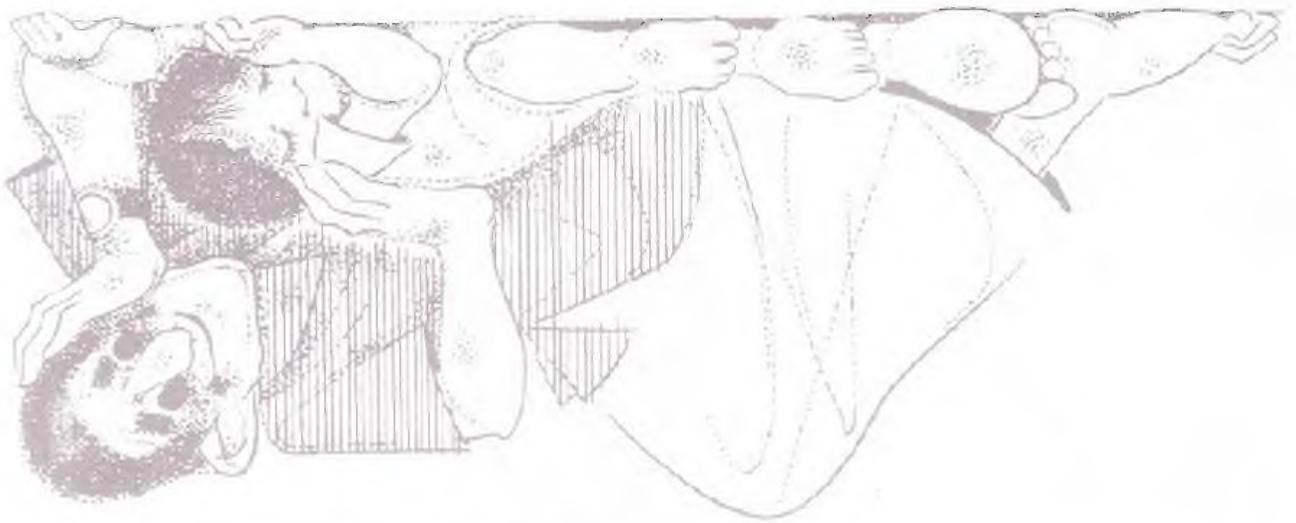
This small book, written in mid 1980s, was a modest attempt in this direction. This book was originally written by me in Hindi. Because of the overwhelmingly positive response, it was translated into Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi and English.

Seeing the need for such books and encouraged by the efforts of organisations working with boys and men on gender issues, we are reprinting this book and making it available to young parents, teachers and social activists, who are eager to see equality between girls and boys, men and women. May equality, justice and human rights for all enshrined in our Constitutions become a reality soon.

Kamla Bhasin

Sleep Little Meeto

Sleep little Meeto
Sleep deeply and dream
Sleep little Meeto
Catch a stray moonbeam.
Father will sing you a song
Mother will soon be along
Sleep little Meeto
Sleep deeply and dream
Sleep little Meeto
Catch a stray moonbeam,
Bring you a story
Of the moonbeam fairy
Who will fly you to the moon
Sitting on a silver spoon.
Sleep little Meeto
Sleep deeply and dream
Sleep little Meeto
Catch a stray moonbeam.

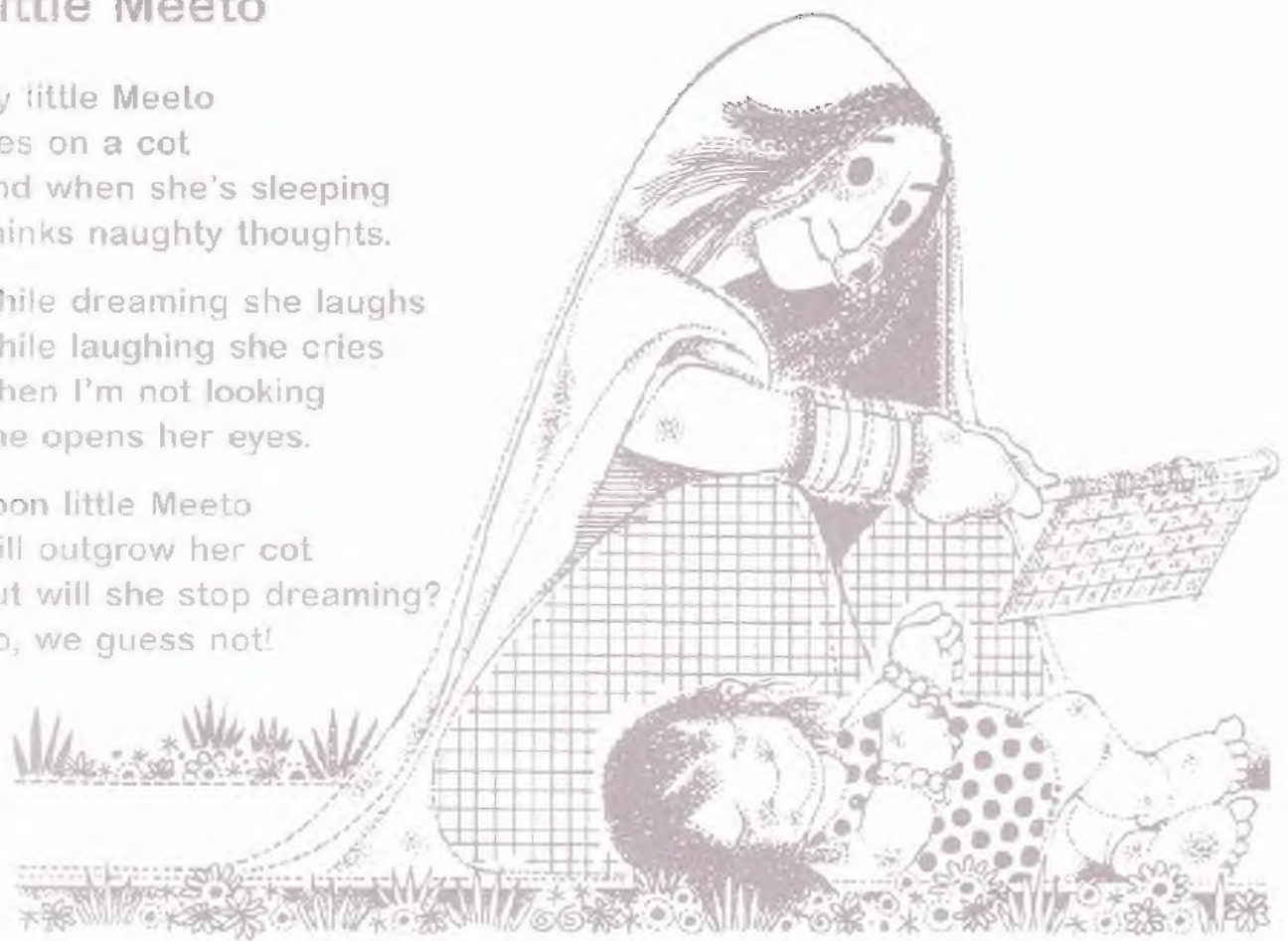


Little Meeto

My little Meeto
Lies on a cot
And when she's sleeping
Thinks naughty thoughts.

While dreaming she laughs
While laughing she cries
When I'm not looking
She opens her eyes.

Soon little Meeto
Will outgrow her cot
But will she stop dreaming?
No, we guess not!

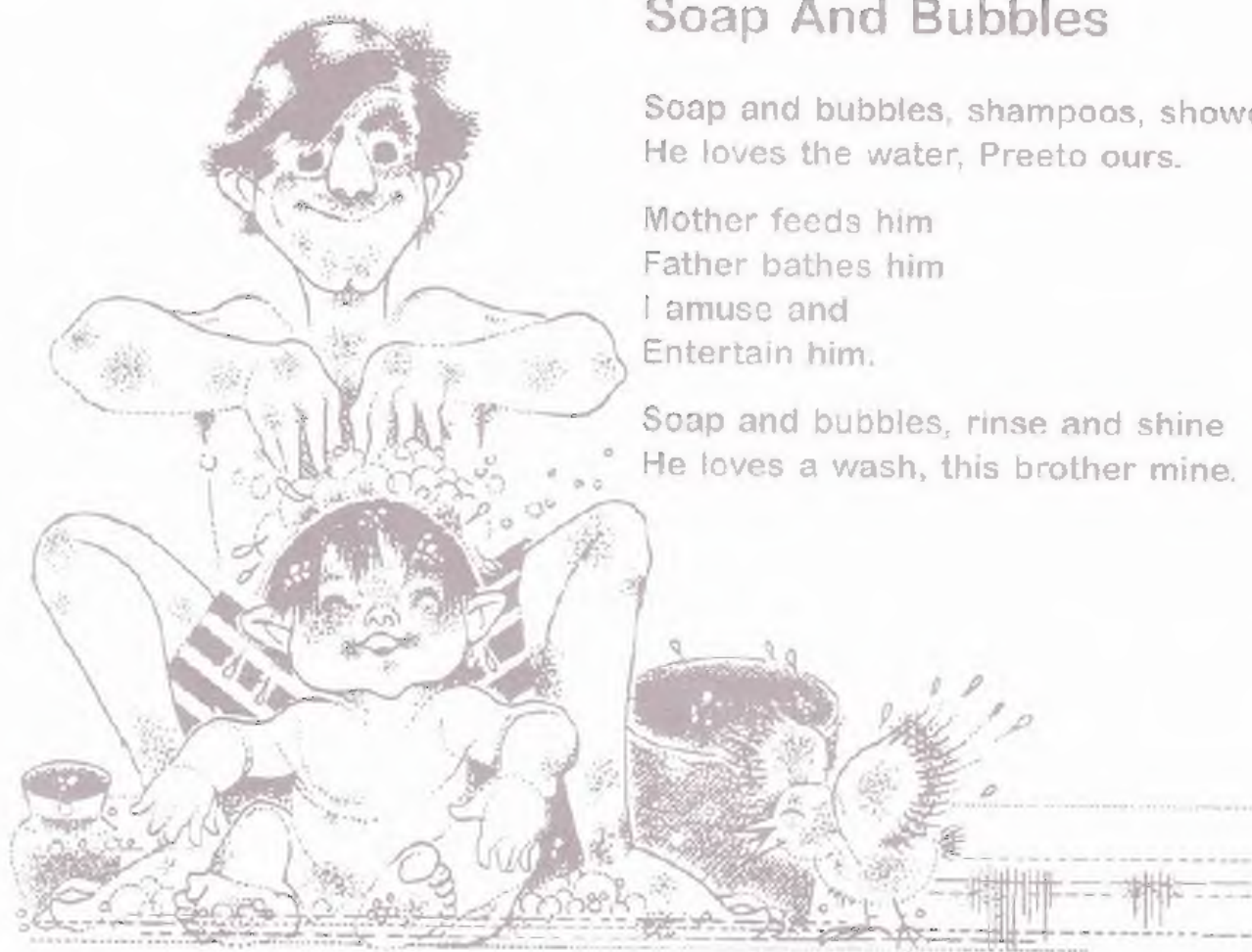


Soap And Bubbles

Soap and bubbles, shampoos, showers
He loves the water, Preeto ours.

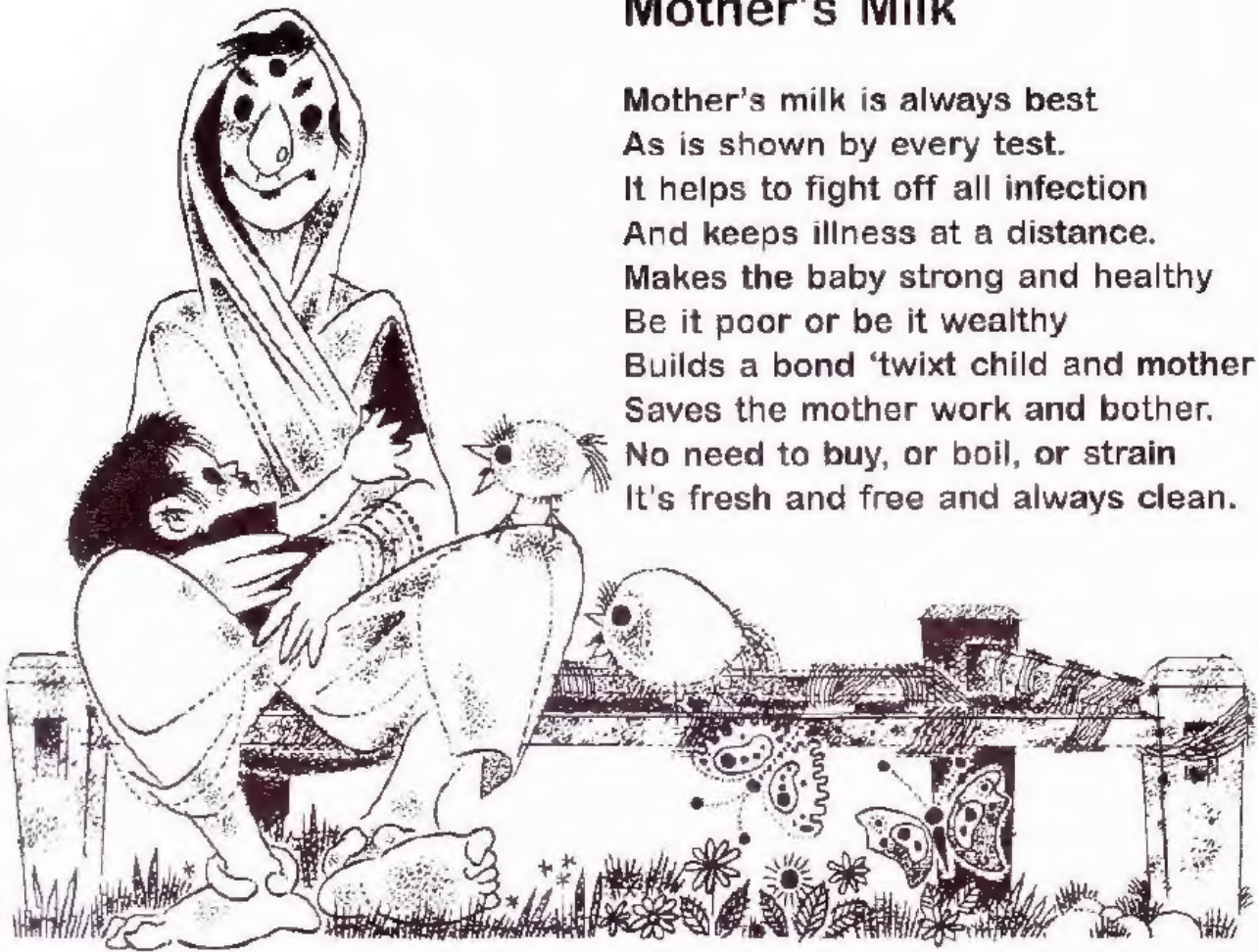
Mother feeds him
Father bathes him
I amuse and
Entertain him.

Soap and bubbles, rinse and shine
He loves a wash, this brother mine.



Mother's Milk

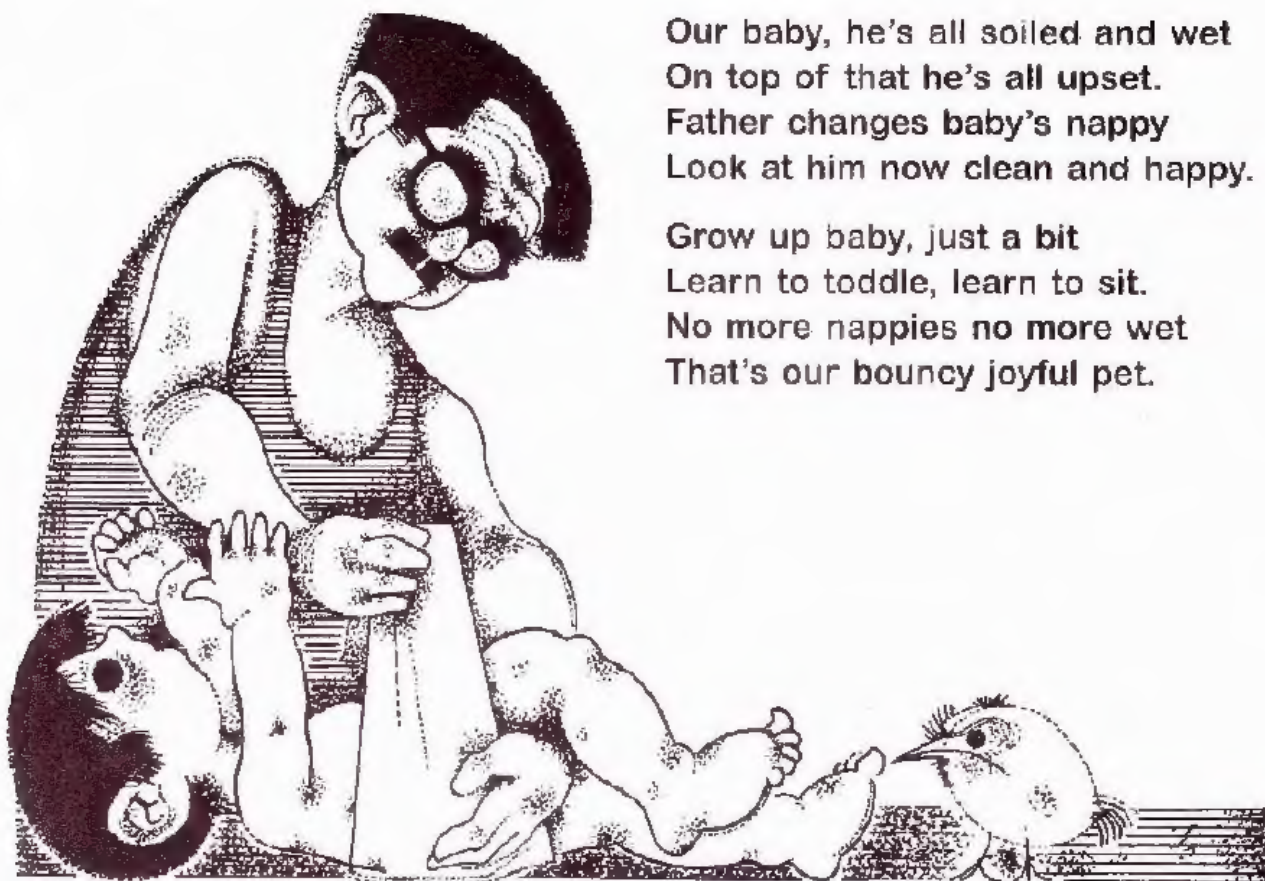
Mother's milk is always best
As is shown by every test.
It helps to fight off all infection
And keeps illness at a distance.
Makes the baby strong and healthy
Be it poor or be it wealthy
Builds a bond 'twixt child and mother
Saves the mother work and bother.
No need to buy, or boil, or strain
It's fresh and free and always clean.



Grow Up Baby

Our baby, he's all soiled and wet
On top of that he's all upset.
Father changes baby's nappy
Look at him now clean and happy.

Grow up baby, just a bit
Learn to toddle, learn to sit.
No more nappies no more wet
That's our bouncy joyful pet.



Meeto's Bath

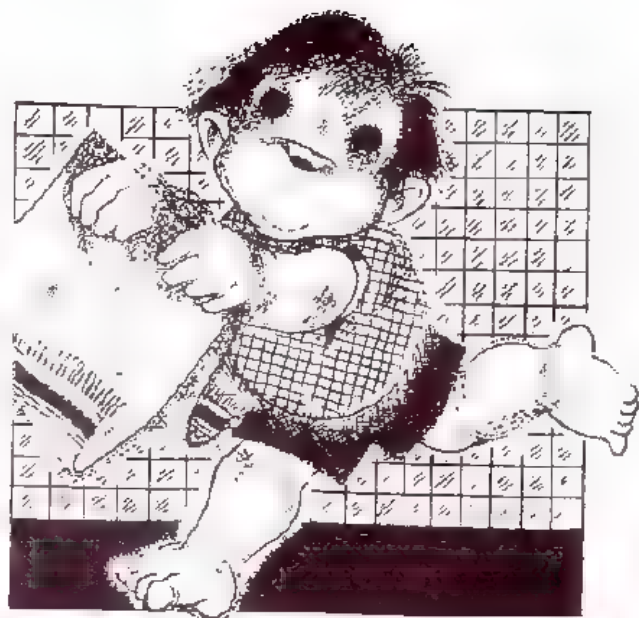
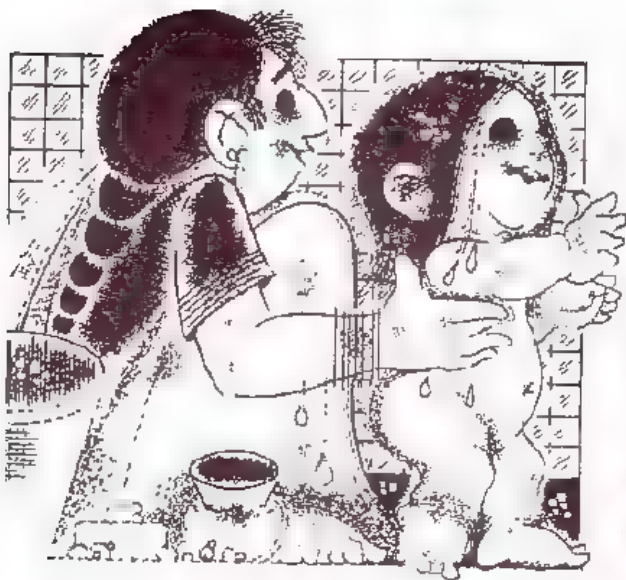
It's time for Meeto's oil massage
And for a soap and bubble wash.



She loves to splash around and play
And if you let her have her way
She'll sit and splash away all day.



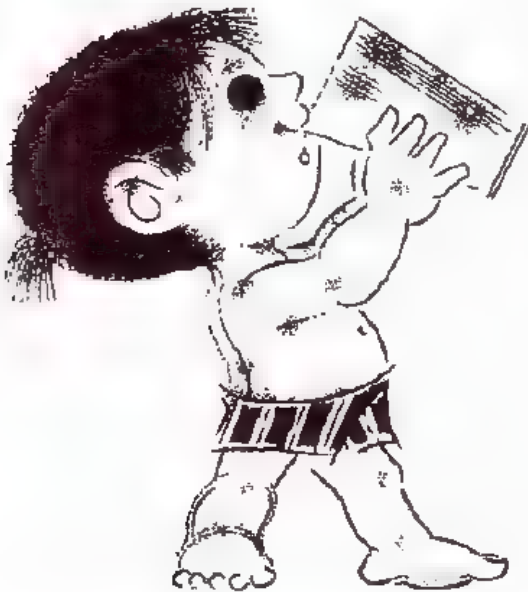
Let's scrub away the grime and dirt
And then put on a soft clean shirt.
But first we need a towel dry
Preeto brings one, quick and spry
What a nice and helpful boy!



One, Two... Twenty

By the time I count to twenty
Preeto's milk glass must be empty.

We'll have to hurry, no more yawning
The sun is out—a lovely morning.



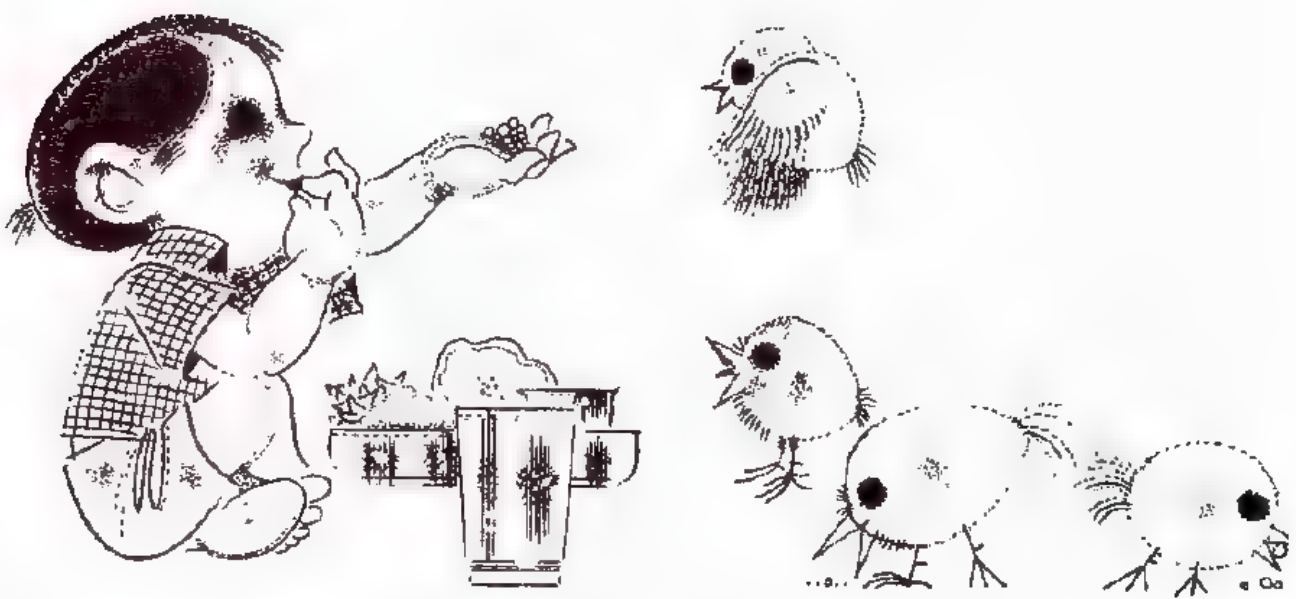
We'll brush our teeth quick as a wink
Then bathe and dress quick as a blink.

Toast for breakfast, apple too
New school books and satchel too.



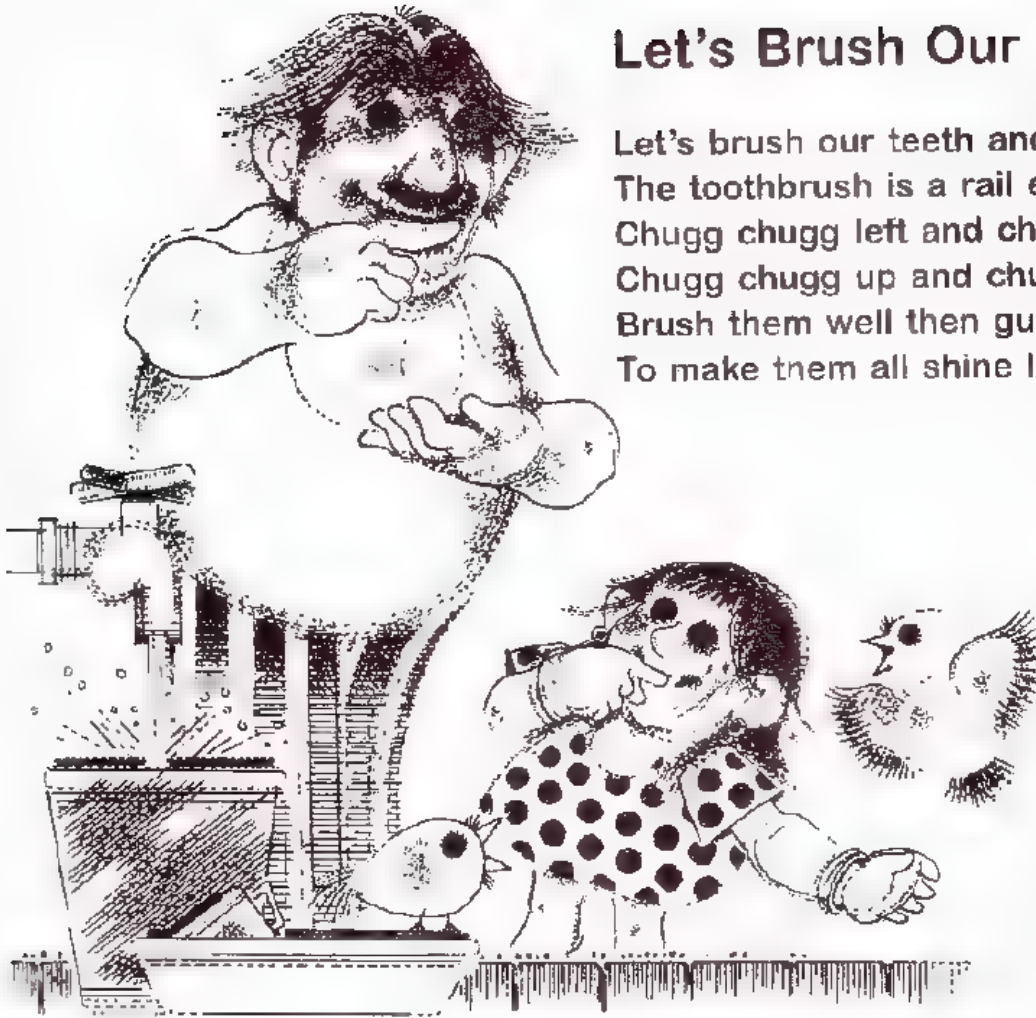
White and ironed clothes to wear
Socks and shoes and slicked down hair.

But first this glass must all be empty
So drink your milk, it's almost twen... ..ty!



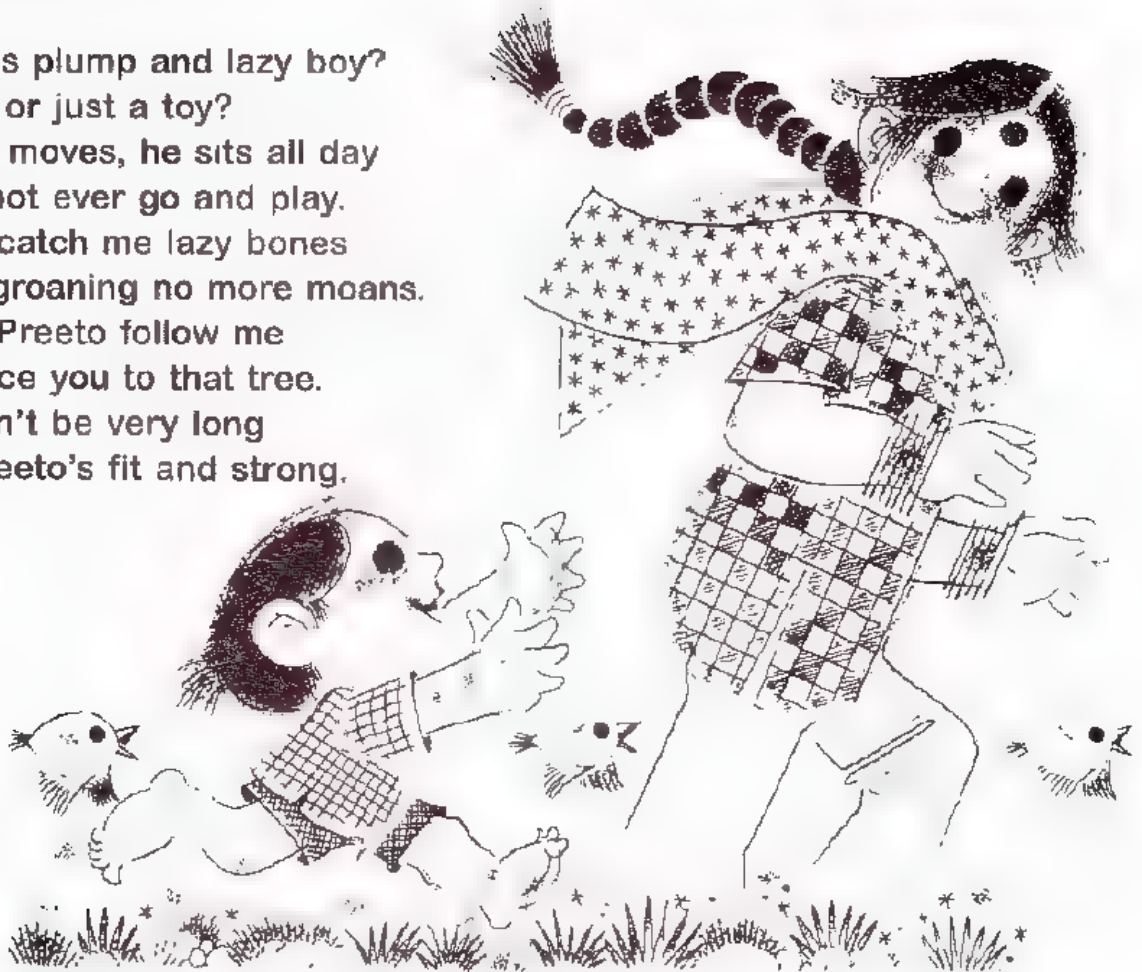
Let's Brush Our Teeth

Let's brush our teeth and imagine
The toothbrush is a rail engine.
Chugg chugg left and chugg chugg right
Chugg chugg up and chugg chugg down.
Brush them well then gurgle gargle
To make them all shine like marble.



Come Catch Me

Who is this plump and lazy boy?
Is he real or just a toy?
He hardly moves, he sits all day
He does not ever go and play.
Come on catch me lazy bones
No more groaning no more moans.
Come on Preeto follow me
Let me race you to that tree.
And it won't be very long
Before Preeto's fit and strong.







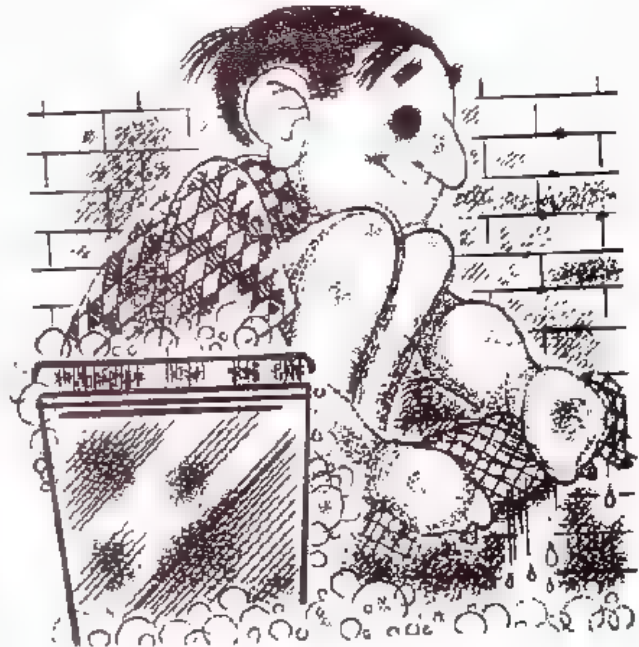
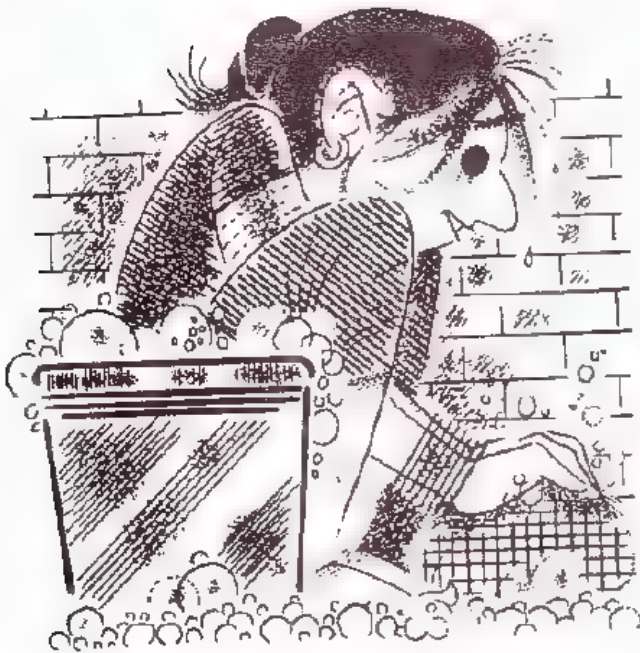
Champion Mother

Mother plays so many games
She puts all other champs to shame.
In football watch her score a goal
And in cricket see her bowl.
In *gulli danda* no one's beat her
And in swimming no one's fleeter.
In hockey you should see her score
In table tennis even more.
Sports with her are always fun
And such a super way to learn.
Would you like to join us too?
Play with us a game or two?

Washing Clothes

The clouds are gone—it's sunshine weather
Let's wash clothes along with mother.

Mother will soap them
Father will wring them
And you and I
Will hang 'em to dry.



When they're dry and ironed crisp
Let's dress quickly for a trip.



Tell Me Why

Tell me why, oh tell me why
Why does baby Meeto cry?
Okay let me have a try.

Maybe she has had a fall?
No, no, she has lost her doll.
Well crying won't help at all!

Let's all search—come follow me.
Ah! there it is beneath that tree.
Look how Meeto laughs in glee!



I Have A Little Brother

I have a little brother
Who's always calling Mother.
Wanting this and wanting that
He's a spoilt and lazy brat.

Listen to me Preeto mine
Don't you think it is now time
That you stop trying to shirk
And take up some of your own work?

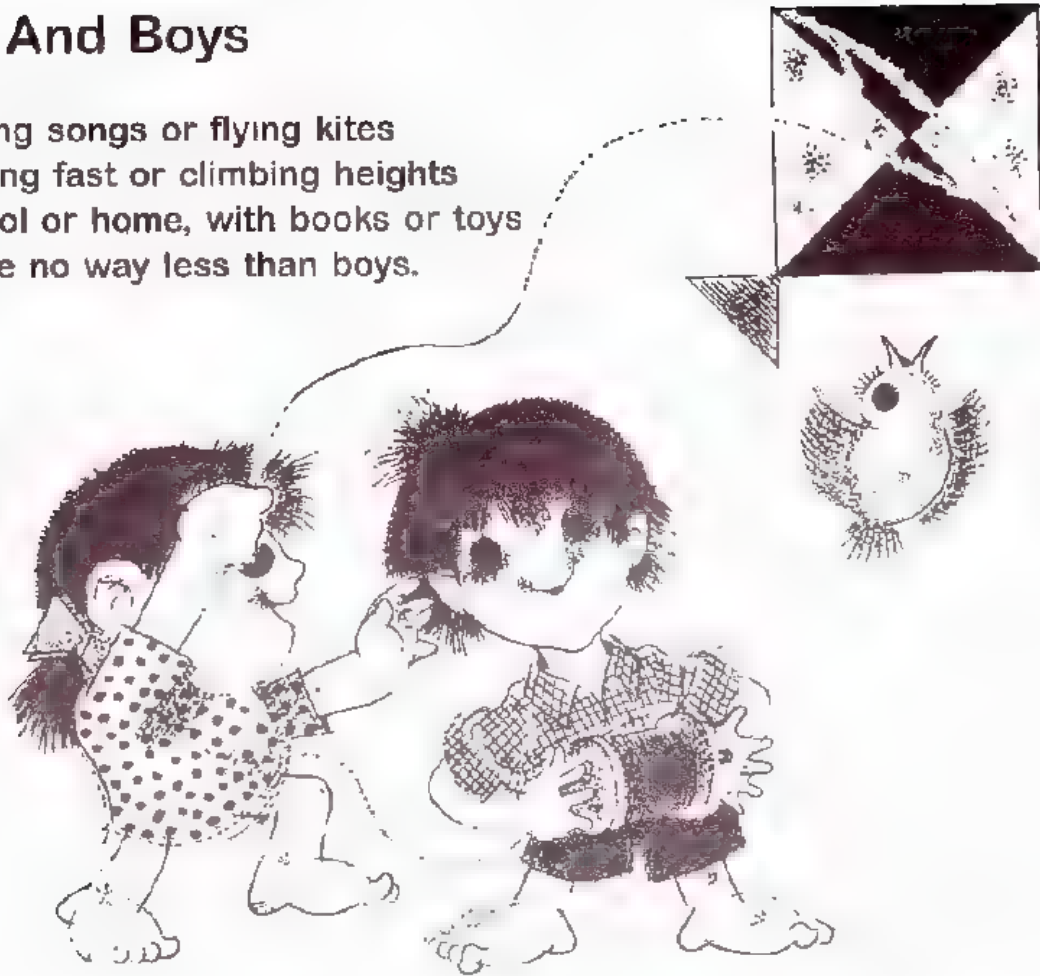
If you find you want to eat
Go and fix yourself a treat.
If you find your button's gone
Learn to sit and sew it on.

When you're hot and need a drink
Fetch some water from the sink.
Help yourself—that's so much nicer.
Mother's coming—let's surprise her!



Girls And Boys

In singing songs or flying kites
In running fast or climbing heights
At school or home, with books or toys
Girls are no way less than boys.



Yes Oh Yes, No Oh No

Do you like eating tasty meals?

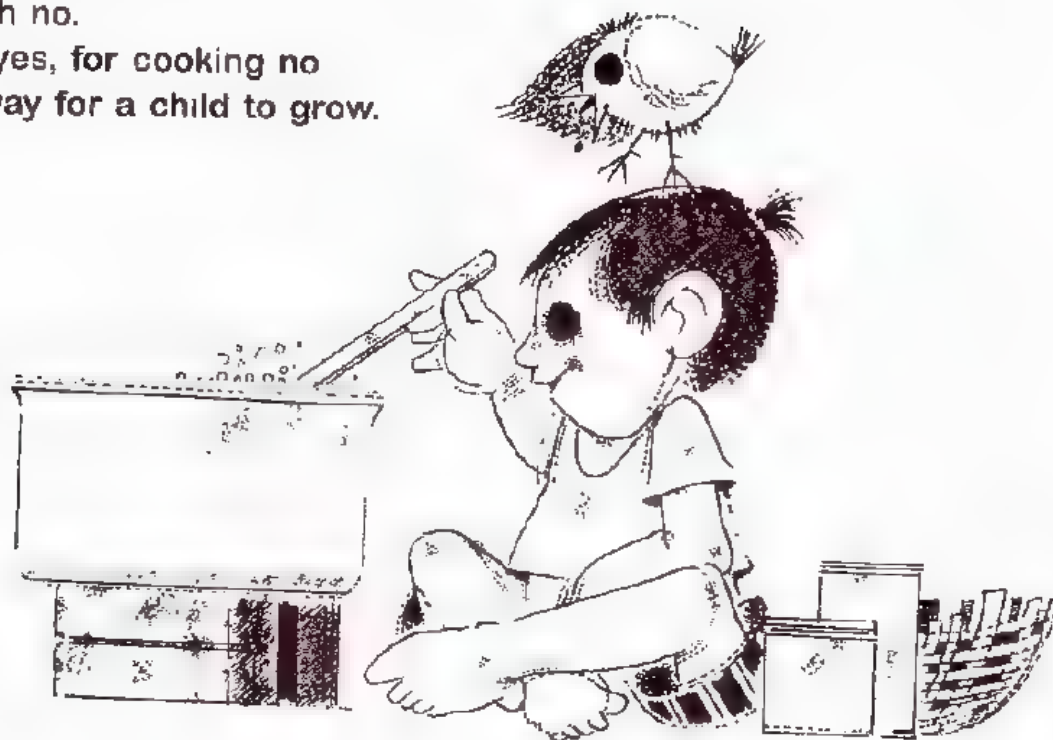
Yes oh yes oh yes.

Do you ever cook your meals?

No oh no oh no.

For eating yes, for cooking no

That's no way for a child to grow.



Do you often mess up floors?
Yes oh yes oh yes.
Do you ever sweep the floors?
No oh no oh no.
For messing yes, for sweeping no
That's no way for a child to grow.



Do you sometimes dirty clothes?
Yes oh yes oh yes.
Do you ever wash your clothes?
No oh no oh no.
For dirtying yes, for washing no
That's no way for a child to grow.

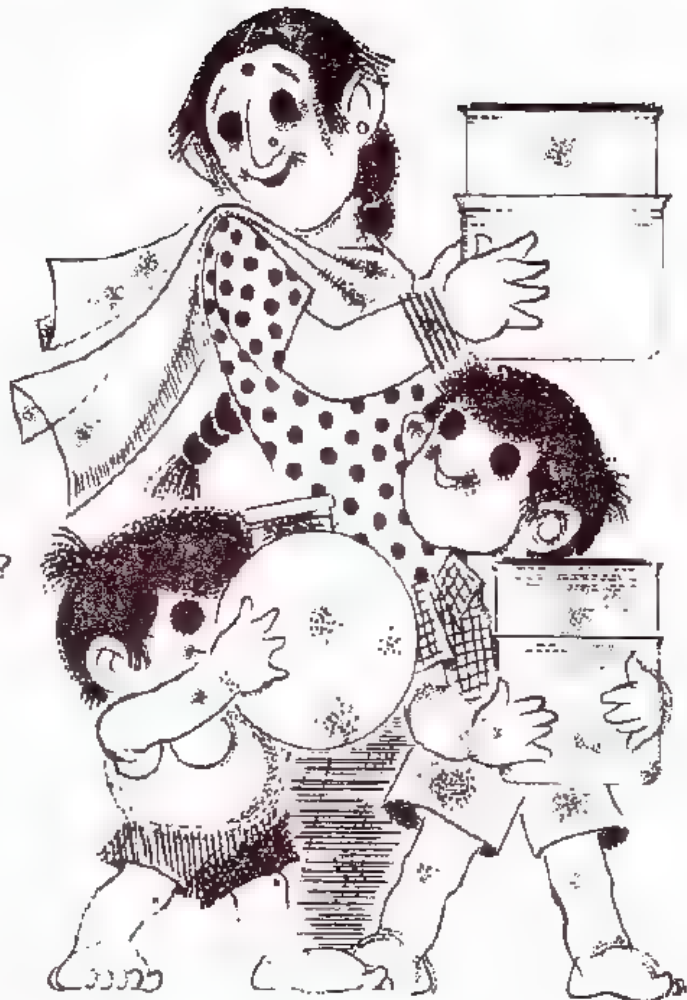


Mother

Mother works away all day
Through the week and all Sunday
She always has something to do
She always has some task in view
She bears the burden all alone
She wears herself down to the bone
Not a moment does she stay
Mother works away all day.

Don't you think this is unfair?
Shouldn't we help and do our share?
Father's going to dust the chairs
Meeto will now sweep the stairs
I will help to clean the pots
We'll all wash the clothes in lots.

Housework's everyone's affair
Let's all help and do our share.





Mama Dearest Mama

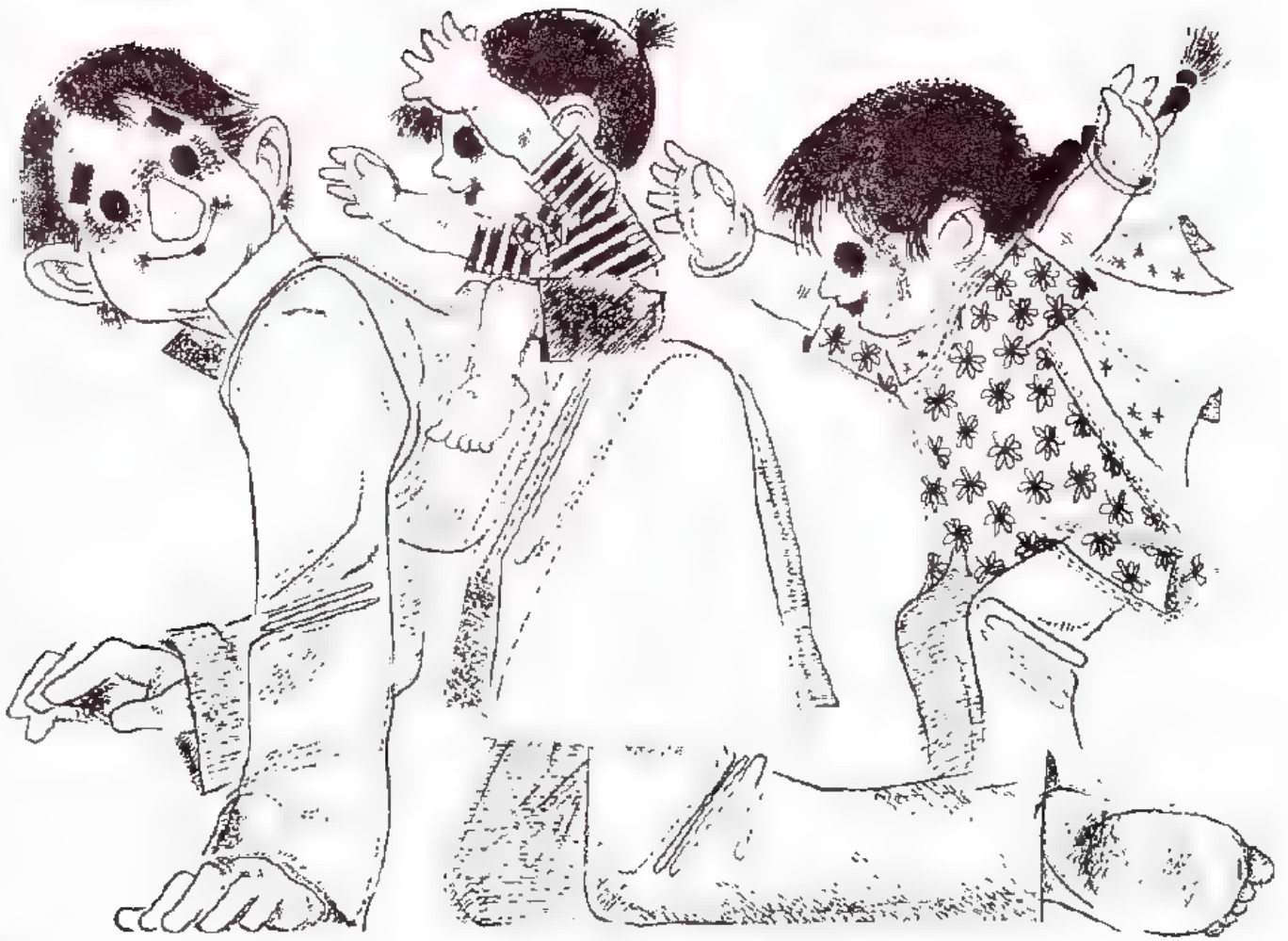
Mama's back, Mama's back
She's brought me books and toys
She'll tell me lots of stories
Of distant girls and boys.
She'll teach me many new things
She'll take me to the park
She knows how rainbows form and
how cats see in the dark
When mama comes from office
I want to shout hurray!
For mama, dearest mama
I have been good all day.

Father

**We have a very special father
Truly like him there's no other.
With him every day is fun day
Monday, Tuesday, also Sunday.**

**When I want he plays with me
And rocks baby on his knee
Gives us joy rides on his back
When we're hungry cooks a
snack.
Puts up with our sulks and tears
Always laughs away our fears.**

**We have a very special father
Truly like him there's no other.**



Our Family

In our family we are four.
Oh we are a happy four.

When the food is cooked by mother
We are bathed and dressed by father.
But when she has some other chore
Father helps a little more.



Sometimes Nani/Nana come.
Oh then we always have such fun.
They join us in our games and tricks
Help us to build toy huts with bricks.



But when we to their village go
We enjoy it even more.
Of stories Nana has a store
And Nani feeds us sweets galore.

Oh we are a happy four
Need we ask for any more?



It's Sunday

It's Sunday, it's Sunday
Holiday and fun day.

No mad rush to get to school
No timetable, no strict rule.
Mother's home and so is father
All of us are here together.

Father's like a busy bee
Making us hot cups of tea.
Mother sits and reads the news
Now and then she gives her views.

It's Sunday, it's Sunday
Holiday and fun day.

